

## **COUNTY COUNCIL - GARTREE NEWS ECO-TOWN UPDATE**

The County Council, after employing expert consultants to produce independent reports, has now formally opposed the eco-town location and Co-op proposals for "Pennbury" near Great Glen. Citing an unworkable location for employment and traffic, and with the likely landscape damage, this is a real fillip to the campaigners who have been fighting the plans for the past 15 months.

A recent financial assessment has raised serious question marks about whether the eco-town could be viable. The Government are due to make a final decision later this summer on up to 10 sites.

### **COUNCIL BEST IN UK**

Leicestershire County Council has been voted the best council in the country at the Local Government Chronicle Awards last month. This prestigious award recognises extremely high levels of excellence and innovation. Leicestershire is the first County Council to win the award. This is a magnificent achievement by the hard working council staff.

### **WARWICK ROAD RAIL BRIDGE**

The length of time being taken to complete the pedestrian footpath over the railway bridge is totally absurd. I have reviewed the position and here are my findings.

Before the housing development, there was no separate footpath over the bridge, but because the road was being upgraded to a distributor road, the separate footpath was designed by the County and the developer for the protection of pedestrians. However, this new footpath appears to be the main cause for the delay, as the height of the pavement above the road now means the bridge parapet does not meet safety regulations, and needs to be higher. In addition there are some major cracks which need fixing. This is why the one side is fenced off still.

County Highways and Kibworth Harcourt Parish Council have been chasing Network Rail to resolve the matter, without progress, for a couple of years. Recently

there have been indications the work could be completed quite soon.

Network Rail insists that the work cannot go ahead until the line below is closed; this is a logical safety precaution.

What really irked me, therefore, was one Sunday in early March, when the line between Market Harborough and Leicester was closed for some repair work, and yet the bridge repair was still left untouched. I therefore contacted the Office of the Rail Regulator (ORR) to ask for extra pressure to be put on Network Rail to allow the work to proceed. Closing the line will cost Network Rail, but what price a pedestrian being hurt while trying to cross the existing bridge, albeit under traffic light control?

The County Council and local parish councils are doing all they can to bring pressure to the third party – Network Rail – but have no direct leverage. The ORR do have responsibility for ensuring rail safety, and this is the tack I am using in my weekly telephone updates. The whole situation shows how an unelected public body can avoid its responsibility over far too long a period.

Just like the time needed to legally acquire a 30m length of land on the Fleckney Road corner by Warwick Road took nearly 2 years, but has now been resolved with the hedge removal and replacement with a wooden fence to improve sight lines, I am more confident now the ORR are involved that the railway bridge will be completed.

### **VISITORS TO LIBRARIES GROWING**

New figures from an independent annual survey of visitors have shown this last 12 months has been a record year for Leicestershire's libraries.

More than 88% of comments from members of the public are positive and the number of visitors last year went up by 13% to over 3.8 million, with the numbers of books, CDs and DVDs borrowed rising to over 4.1 million. This means that more than 50% of local people used the library service last year.

Over the last few years the County Council has invested in new or enhanced

libraries, such as Kibworth, and improving services, and these figures clearly show how successful the service has become as a result. If you haven't been to your local library recently, I recommend that you go along and see the range of facilities now available.

I am meeting the County Librarian in early April, to talk about the feasibility of relocating Kibworth library, as posed in the "Vision for Kibworth" on last month's front page.

**Kevin Feltham (kfeltham@leics.gov.uk)**  
**0116 2793232 (www.gartree.org.uk)**